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What is translation?

The nature of translation

Translation is the replacement of an original text with another text.

As such, translation has been regarded as a kind of inferior substitute for the real thing, and it has been likened to the back of a carpet, or a kiss through a handkerchief. But it can also be seen more positively as providing access to ideas and experiences that, although represented at second hand, would otherwise be closed off in an unknown language.

So although translation can be seen as a kind of limitation, it also has the opposite function of overcoming the limitations that particular languages impose on their speakers. Instead of comparing it to such reduced activities as hygienic kissing or laying down a carpet bottom-side up, translation can also be compared to building bridges or extending horizons, metaphors which point to the positive, enabling function of translation. In this sense translation can be seen as a service: it serves a need human beings apparently have to transcend the world to which their own particular languages confine them. Translations mediate between languages, societies, and literatures, and it is through translations that linguistic and cultural barriers may be overcome.

Translation, of its nature, provides access to something, some message, that already exists, and it is always therefore a secondary communication. Normally, a communicative event happens just once. With translation, however, communicative events are reduplicated for people originally prevented from participating in, or appreciating, the original event.

Kinds of translation

Translation is the process of replacing an original text, known as the **source text**, with a substitute one, known as the **target text**.

The process is usually an **interlingual translation** in that the message in the source language text is rendered as a target text in a different language, and it is in this sense that we have referred to translation so far. But sometimes the term is also used to refer to an **intralingual translation**, a process whereby a text in one variety of the language is reworded into another. This would be the case where the message of a text in, say, Old English is reworked into a text in Modern English, or a text in one dialect or style is reworked into another. And we can also speak of 'translation', when the replacement involves not another language but another, non-linguistic, means of expression, in other words a different semiotic system. In this sense we can say for instance that a poem is 'translated' into a dance or a picture, a novel into an opera or a film. Such transmutations are examples of **intersemiotic translation**.

What all these three processes have in common is that they involve the replacement of one expression of a message or unit of meaningful content by another in a different form.

The term 'translation' is also sometimes used to describe linguistic activities such as summarizing or paraphrasing. Although such activities resemble translation in that they replace a message that already exists, they differ in that they are designed not to reproduce the original as a whole but to reduce it to its essential parts, or adapt it for different groups of people with different needs and expectations. In this book we will be concerned with translation as it is most commonly understood, that is to say as the process of interlingual replacement of one text by another.

Translation defined

Translation is a process of replacing a text in one language by a text in another.

We now need to look more closely at just what this involves. To begin with, any reference to text makes it clear that we are concerned with particular communicative uses of language, and

not with linguistic forms as such. A text is never just a sum of its parts, and when words and sentences are used in communication, they combine to 'make meaning' in different ways. In translating it is the text as a whole that is replaced and not its constituent parts: we do not exchange one separate word or sentence for another. Translation deals with the relationship between texts as actual uses of language, and so is entirely different from an activity like contrastive analysis, which is concerned with relating two languages as abstract systems. We can demonstrate this difference in purpose with the following short extract taken from the famous physicist Richard Feynman's autobiography (Richard P. Feynman 1985. *Surely You're Joking, Mr Feynman!* New York: Bantam Books) and its translation into German.

Original

In any thinking process there are moments when everything is going good and you've got wonderful ideas. Teaching is an interruption, and so it's the greatest pain in the neck in the world. And then there are longer periods of time when not much is coming to you. You're not getting any ideas, and if you're doing nothing at all, it drives you nuts!

Translation

Bei jeder geistigen Arbeit gibt es Momente, in denen alles gut läuft und man tolle Einfälle hat. Unterrichten zu müssen, bedeutet eine Unterbrechung, und deshalb ist das die größte Geduldsprobe, die man sich vorstellen kann. Und dann gibt es die längeren Phasen, in denen einem nicht viel kommt. Man hat keine Einfälle, und wenn man nichts zu tun hat, macht einen das wahnsinnig!

Gloss

In any intellectual work there are moments in which everything runs well and one has super ideas. To have to teach means an interruption, and therefore it is the greatest test of patience which one can imagine. And then there are longer phases in which not much comes to one. One does not have ideas, and when one does not have anything to do, that makes one mad!

In this extract and throughout this book, glosses are provided for cited non-English texts. A gloss itself is a type of translation, and glosses in this book serve two purposes. Firstly, they give the reader who has little or no competence in the language concerned an indication of the text's semantic content and secondly, the gloss provided highlights translation difficulties which it fails to resolve.

The above translation raises some contrastive issues (marked in the text by underlining), for instance, that the verb form 'is going' in English is rendered by *läuft* in German. In a contrastive analysis, we would examine how tense and aspect are expressed in English and German, and establish that there is no corresponding linguistic expression in German for the *ing*-form, which in our example expresses an ongoing process. We would note that the simple present in German can also express the notion of an ongoing process (sometimes supported by an adverbial such as *gerade* (just)). We might further contrast personal pronouns in English and German examining, for instance, when and why the personal pronoun 'you' in English is used while the impersonal pronouns *man* (one) or *einen* (one) are used in German.

When we compare the above translation with its original, however, we are more interested in how the translator chose to render in German 'is going' making use of the different resources of German. We are not particularly interested in the fact that a 'direct' translation is not available because of differences in the two linguistic systems. Further, we will want to know how and whether a particular translation choice, for instance *man* (one) in German instead of 'you' affects other translation decisions. We would ask why the translator opts for *man* and not *Du* (you) or *Sie* (formal address), which are available in the German linguistic system. And we would wonder why the noun 'Teaching' is rendered as *Unterrichten zu müssen* (to have to teach) when other choices are available—in this case, for instance, *Unterricht*, *Lehre*, *Vorlesung halten*—and what the translator's particular choice does to the meaning and function of the whole text.

The choices made by the translator (*läuft*, *man/einen*, *Unterrichten zu müssen*) will in part be made with reference to how texts of this kind are written in German. In translating there is thus both an orientation backwards to the message of

the source text and an orientation forwards towards how similar texts are written in the target language. So we have in translation something like a ~~double-headed relationship~~.

Let us first look more closely at the orientation backwards. It refers to the central requirement that the content of a translation should match the content of the original. This sameness of meaning in the source and target texts is known as semantic equivalence. For instance, in the above extract the phrases 'everything is going good' and *alles gut läuft* can be said to be semantically equivalent. In a forwards orientation in translation, however, we have to consider another kind of equivalence, which involves for example issues of style, formality, register, and so on.

We can, for example, immediately detect a difference in the style level of the two texts we have been looking at. For instance, the clause 'Teaching is an interruption, and so it's the greatest pain in the neck' is more colloquial or informal than the German: *Unterrichten zu müssen, bedeutet eine Unterbrechung, und deshalb ist das die größte Geduldsprobe, die man sich vorstellen kann*. Equally, the phrase 'drives you nuts' differs in formality from *macht einen das wahnsinnig*.

Whether or not this difference counts as pragmatic non-equivalence depends on how texts such as this translation are conventionally written in German. If German readers are used to and prefer the more formal style level in this type of text, then we may say that pragmatic equivalence is paradoxically achieved because the level of formality has shifted. In saying that two texts, an original and its translation, are equivalent, we mean that—given their respective contexts—they are comparable in semantic and pragmatic meaning. We will deal in greater depth with the concept of equivalence in Chapter 3.

We earlier defined translation as a process of replacing a text in one language by an equivalent text in another. This process involves two phases: first the original has to be understood/interpreted—this is the first phase, and then this interpretation has to be rendered, and this is the second phase. So equivalence is mediated through interpretation. Strictly speaking, the second text then is not so much a reproduction of the first as the rendering of an interpreted version of it: the translational process is thus: text 1 (original)—discourse interpretation—text 2 (translation).

So the three basic features of translation we have identified—text, equivalence, process—are in fact implicationally related: it is at the level of texts that translations are equivalent, and it is in the process of interpretation and rendering text 1 that translation equivalence is achieved. Text 2 is the translation product which results from the process of interpreting and rendering text 1.

Translation and interpreting

Translation can be written or oral. The written form is known as translation, the oral one is known as interpreting—a term distinct from the type of ‘interpreting’ mentioned above with reference to understanding and explicating the meaning of a text. In professional conference interpreting, a distinction is usually made between simultaneous and consecutive interpreting. In the former, the act of interpreting is carried out while the speaker is still talking; in the latter, interpreting occurs after the speaker has finished.

In written translation a fixed, permanently available and in principle unlimitedly repeatable text in one language is changed into a text in another language, which can be corrected as often as the translator sees fit. In interpreting, on the other hand, a text is transformed into a new text in another language, which is, as a rule, orally available only once. Since the new text emerges chunk by chunk and does not ‘stay’ permanently with the interpreter (or the addressees), it is only controllable and correctible by the interpreter to a limited extent. While some steps in interpreting can be regarded as ‘automatic’ and need little reflective thought, others may be more difficult and take time. This can lead to serious problems, as the interpreter has to listen and interpret at the same time. All this is very different in translating, where the translator can usually read and translate the source text at his or her own pace. Further, the original is available for translation in its entirety, whereas, in simultaneous and consecutive (conference) interpreting, it is produced and presented bit by bit. This is a great challenge for the interpreter who needs to create an ongoing text out of these bits that must eventually form a coherent whole.

Besides conference interpreting in national or international environments, another type of interpreting, known as ‘commu-

nity interpreting' (sometimes also called 'public service interpreting' or 'dialogue interpreting') has recently gained importance. Given increasing international migration and the resulting mixture of linguistic backgrounds, community interpreting fulfils an important mediating function in that it facilitates communication between officials and lay persons who speak different languages. Community interpreting is almost always carried out consecutively (face-to-face or over the phone). It takes place for instance in police or immigration departments, social welfare centres, hospitals, schools or prisons, and is either carried out by untrained 'natural interpreters' such as bilingual relatives and friends, or by professional experts in specialist (legal, medical, etc.) domains. The interpreter has to interpret for both parties, thus switching between both languages. Untrained volunteer community interpreters are often neither neutral nor objective when they interpret for a relative or a friend; rather, they tend to take the side of whoever they are helping out in an institutional context. A type of interpreting which is similar to community interpreting is 'liaison interpreting', but here the interpreting is done between persons of equal status in business and technical meetings.

The distinction between translation (written) and interpreting (oral) is a necessary one—they are very different activities. In written translation, neither author of source texts nor addressees of target texts are usually present so no overt interaction or direct feedback can take place. In the interpreting situation, on the other hand, both author and addressees are usually present, and interaction and feedback may occur. In this book, we shall be concerned primarily with the written form, translation, and we shall only occasionally consider the oral form, interpreting.

Human and machine translation

The act of translating can be performed not only by a human being but also by a machine. **Machine translation** can be fully automatic or semi-automatic. In fully automatic translation, the original text is fed into the computer, and the translation is delivered with no human involvement. So far, fully automatic machine translation can only produce very 'rough' drafts, that

is to say quick and dirty first versions, as can be seen in the following (constructed) example of a translation of a Volkswagen annual report:

Original

Die aus den Vorjahren bekannten Probleme im Weltwährungssystem spitzten sich weiter zu. Sie erreichten ihren Höhepunkt, als der Dollarkurs auf 2,28 Mark sank. Dies verursachte eine weitere Verteuerung des deutschen Exports.

Fully automatic machine translation

The from the foreyears known problems in worldcurrencysystem pointed themselves again to. They reached their highpoint as the dollarcourse sank to DM 2.28. This caused a further endearing of German exports.

Such versions can, however, be quite useful, for instance, whenever a human translation is, for whatever reason, simply not available, and whenever highly specialized scientists need to know quickly what a technical article is all about. For such a specialist, a fully automatic translation may be perfectly acceptable even though its wording, as in the above example, can be very clumsy. The specialist's familiarity with the subject in question is likely to disambiguate any oddity in the automatically produced text. If, however, one wants to improve the quality of machine translations, heavy pre- and post-editing by a human translator is still indispensable, and the translation will then become a semi-automatic one. Some translation programs also stop whenever the program cannot, for example, decide which meaning to give to an ambiguous term, and a human translator will make the decision, after which the program carries on.

Further, specific computer programs are available which can help the human translator in three different ways. Firstly, translation software can help the translator solve difficult translation problems by offering lexical help through workstations that provide access to online dictionaries or give grammatical help in the form of conventionally co-occurring patterns of words. Secondly, computers can assist the translator in his or her attempt to retrieve highly routinized and idiomatic target language struc-

tures. And thirdly, computers can help human translators by providing encyclopaedic knowledge: they offer search procedures and indicate how to fill knowledge gaps that typically occur with (conceptual and linguistic) problems of terminology.

To improve these different types of machine translation programs, researchers use the findings of studies of translators' thoughts and behaviour. Machines can then imitate these human translation strategies. So there is a kind of 'division of labour' between man and machine in **computer-assisted translation**: computer programs relieve the human translator of boring and time-consuming routine tasks, and give him or her access to different translation reference works thus freeing up the translator for more creative, non-mechanical problem solving and decision making.

It is unlikely that software will ever replace the human translator completely. The dream of a fully competent independent machine translating system is still a long way off. But machine translation in its different forms is certainly here to stay. It is particularly useful if one is interested in regular and predictable translations of highly specific texts, for which the transmission of information is dominant (for example, translating into English Japanese business market reports or Chinese papers in the field of astronomy). The usefulness of machine translation is however much reduced in the case of literary texts and other types of creative writing, which draw heavily on associations and connotative meanings as well as pragmatic and cultural knowledge.

Translation as communication across cultures

Translating is not only a linguistic act, it is also a cultural one, an act of communication across cultures. Translating always involves both language and culture simply because the two cannot really be separated. Language is culturally embedded: it both expresses and shapes cultural reality, and the meanings of linguistic items, be they words or larger segments of text, can only be understood when considered together with the cultural context in which these linguistic items are used. For example, a simple expression such as 'We had dinner' written in a British cultural context cannot be transposed into an Arabic, German, Finnish,

or indeed an American English context without considering the different cultural 'meanings' this expression acquires in these different contexts. Since in translation meaning is of overriding importance, it follows that the cultural frame of reference cannot be ignored. In the process of translation, therefore, not only the two languages but also the two cultures come into contact. In this sense, translating is a form of intercultural communication.

But what do we mean when we talk about 'culture' in this context? **Culture** refers to a group's shared values and conventions which act as mental guidelines for orienting people's thoughts and behaviour. Now it is of course true that we find in any group many different values, beliefs, and behaviours. However, we are interested here in how different cultural habits and views are encapsulated in language and become externalized when communicated to others in the social group. If such communication occurs often enough in a particular social group, it can turn into 'cultural representations' in the minds of group members. Language use and convention, therefore, vitally contribute to social bonding and cultural identity. This conventionalization of meaning through language within a particular culture is of crucial importance for translation: it is precisely these similarities and differences in kind and degree of conventionalization in the source and target cultures which a translator must be aware of when moving a text from one culture to another. In translating a reference to a particular date which is important in a particular culture, for example, it may become necessary to explain the 'meaning' this date has acquired for members of the source culture. Consider for instance a reference to the 4th of July in an American text, the 17th of May in a Norwegian text, the 17th of June in a German text, or the 14th of July in a French one. The 'meaning' which these dates carry is culturally embedded, and cannot be understood in the abstract, divorced from the historical tradition shared by members of a particular culture.

We said earlier that one of the main characteristics of translating is its ~~double~~ **double-bind** situation', where the translator has to link the source text in its cultural context to the target communicative-cultural conditions. The more the source and target cultural frameworks differ, the more important is the cultural work translators have to do. This includes an awareness and

knowledge of the cultural implications of the source text and a familiarity with the culture into which the translation is to be 'fitted'. Take the case of an English text, in which traditional English ways of celebrating Christmas are mentioned:

On Christmas Eve, the children put out their stockings. They were so excited that it took them a very long time to fall asleep.

A translation of this sentence without further explanation might well cause surprise at such odd behaviour. The translator may have to add a brief explanatory note or, if relevant, point to a comparable custom in the target culture.

Over and above recognizing the importance of these two larger cultural frameworks, however, translators must also pay attention to the more immediate **context of situation**. This more local situational context has to do with the question of who wrote the text, when and why, and who is now reading it, who translated it, when and why, and further, who is now to read it and for what purpose. And these different questions are reflected in how the text is written, interpreted, translated, and read. The context of situation is then itself embedded in the larger cultural world as depicted in the texts and in the real world.

Summary

Translation is a kind of secondary communication with both a limiting and an enabling function. It can be defined as a process of replacing a text in one language by an equivalent text in another. The three basic features of translation are thus **text, equivalence, and process**. Traditionally, one distinguishes between interpreting and translation, between human and machine translation, and between translation as a linguistic act and translation as intercultural communication.

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Some perspectives on translation

In Chapter 1 we had a glimpse of how complex translation is. This complexity comes about not only because of the problems of pinning down the meaning of an original text, but because of the need to restate that meaning in another text. Different perspectives on translation have focused attention on different aspects of that process and these differences are what the present chapter is concerned with.

Focus on the original text

In this approach, particular attention is paid to the original text as an example of how a particular language works, with a view to noting how it contrasts with the language into which it is to be translated. Translation from this point of view is related to **contrastive linguistics**. There are, however, some crucial differences. While contrastive linguists are interested in equivalences of linguistic categories within and across languages, translation scholars focus on equivalence in texts, in the actual use of the languages and their component parts in communicative situations. The relevant question for translation is how far the meaning of a text produced in language A can be expressed in a text in language B.

Translation does, however, draw on the findings of contrastive linguistics: many translation problems can be described on the basis of differences across linguistic systems. For instance, descriptions of how concepts such as time are encoded in different tense systems can inform translation strategies used for dealing with descriptions of events in another language. Contrastive

linguistics becomes even more relevant when it extends its scope to deal not only with linguistic forms but with the way they are typically used in different languages to organize information, perform communicative acts, or express attitude. How far languages do and do not correspond in general across these different levels obviously gives crucial guidance to the translator when it comes to establishing correspondences across particular texts in different languages.

Some approaches to language description are more relevant to translation than others. Formal approaches as exemplified by generative or cognitive grammar are generally not very useful for translation because they are primarily concerned with the encoded or semantic meaning as exemplified by sentences; language use, however, consists of texts not sentences, and texts are not just strings of sentences. So how one interprets a text involves more than just deciphering its constituent sentences—though deciphering the sentence may be a starting point. In other words, while these formal models of linguistic description have their relevance for translation, it is limited.

More promising for translation are **functional theories of language**. These give priority to language use in social communicative situations and examine how language, situation, and culture hang together. Particularly influential for translation is Hallidayan functional linguistics with its emphasis on a systematic connection between linguistic forms and their functions. For Halliday, linguistic forms are the semantic encodings of the social functions that a language has evolved to serve. Hallidayan **systemic-functional grammar** adds an extra dimension to semantic meaning—and so, one might argue, provides more insights for the translator. It is not just sentences as formal objects, but as messages, as exchanges, as representations, that are being focused on. But these functions are still semantic and accounted for within the sentence. They do not account for the way language functions pragmatically in texts. Texts, however, of primary importance in translation, are located in contexts, and can then be seen in terms of conventions of use or register. We will deal with the important concept of register in greater detail in Chapter 3.

So far we have been considering the relevance to translation of a focus on the text using linguistically informed analyses.

Perhaps the most notable examples of text-oriented approaches to translation are those of Catford and Nida. Both are concerned with making the source and target texts as closely equivalent in meaning as possible—though for different reasons, and with different theoretical backgrounds.

An important feature of J.C. Catford's early classic *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* is its view of meaning: meaning is not assumed to be 'transferred' from an original to its translation; rather it can only be *replaced*, so that it functions in a comparable way in its new contextual and textual environment. This insight is crucial for translation in that it implies a view of meaning as being inextricably enmeshed in the context of use of a linguistic unit. It is then only through a referral of linguistic units to their context of situation that meaning replacement becomes possible. And translation can occur because both original texts and translation texts can be relatable to functionally relevant features of the sociocultural situation enveloping the texts. While the idea of *transference* suggests that there is meaning contained within the original text which is taken out and given a different verbal expression, *replacement* suggests that the meaning is a function of the relationship between text and context, and so can only be replaced by in some way replicating the relationship.

Catford makes a crucial distinction between **formal correspondence** and **textual equivalence** in translation. Formal correspondence is a matter of the language system (*langue*), textual equivalence a matter of the realization of that system (*parole*). Formal correspondence between items in the original and in the translation exists whenever a category in the target language has approximately the same position in its system of *langue* as the corresponding category in the source language. For instance, the coordinate conjunctions 'and' in English and *und* in German function in basically similar ways in the two languages; a translator can therefore easily translate English 'and' into German *und*, and can reach textual equivalence. But there are many other cases where the translator has to routinely engage in so-called translation shifts. These will involve departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from one language to another using shifts from grammar to lexis and vice versa. For example, translations

of English verbal aspects into German commonly involve shifts from grammar to lexis. For instance, 'He was hanging up his coat when the bell rang' would be rendered as *Er hing gerade seinen Mantel auf, als es klingelte*, where the aspectual form is expressed by the German lexical item *gerade*.

The second classic attempt to develop a separate linguistic approach to translation is Eugene Nida's sociolinguistic theory of translation. Nida's interest in translation stems from Bible translation, in which he had been personally involved for a long time. In Nida's view, translation is first and foremost directed towards its recipients. He therefore takes account of the differences between source text and target text recipients in terms of their expectation norms and their knowledge of the world. Nida sees translation as basically an adaptation of an original (the Bible) to widely differing linguistic-cultural conventions. Such an adaptation is always necessary: only when a translation is adapted to the needs of the new recipients can it have the intended effect (a missionizing one in the case of the Bible). But despite the necessity to adapt the original message to the immensely varying needs of different addressees, the sacred 'truth' of the biblical message in the original text remains important and must be maintained. In order to resolve this dilemma, Nida identifies two different yardsticks for translation, which he calls **formal equivalence** and **dynamic equivalence**. The former implies a formal orientation such that the message in the receptor language is to match as closely as possible the corresponding linguistic forms in the source language, and the latter refers to complete target language 'naturalness'. This is not unlike Catford's distinction between formal correspondence and textual equivalence.

The method of translation suggested by Nida is a procedure developed on the basis of transformational-generative grammar in its early form. Translation is assumed to consist of three phases: analysis, transfer, and reconstruction. For the purpose of translation, the concept of transformation is reconceptualized as 'paraphrase'. Sentences available in their surface structure are analysed by the translator to yield (via paraphrasing) underlying or 'kernel sentences', which are then transferred into similar target language structures that are in turn restructured into a target text. For example, the

sentence: 'John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' can be broken down into the following five basic kernels:

John preached
[[John baptizes the people] →
[The people repent] →
[God forgives
[The people sin]]].

In other words, the message as given in language A is first analysed in terms of the grammatical relationships and the meanings of words and their combinations; secondly, this analysed material is transferred in the mind of the translator from language A to language B; and thirdly, the transferred material is restructured in order to make the message fully acceptable in the receptor language B.

To sum up, the focus on the original text in translation is different from **contrastive analysis**. If it considers texts at all, contrastive analysis uses texts primarily to exemplify abstract categories of the language system. Whereas contrastive analysis uses information from the system to throw light on the texts and looks at what particular parts of the language system mean semantically, translation is about what people mean by the language pragmatically. In the context of translation, a focus on the (original) text means analysing it, and systematically linking its forms and functions in order to reveal the original author's motivated choices. The aim is to enable the translator to make his or her own choices.

Focus on the process of interpretation

By focusing on the source text as described above, there is an implication that meaning is contained within the language itself. But if there is a focus on the *process* of interpreting a text, attention shifts from the text itself to a process involving a human being, a reader and his or her cognitive and emotive activity. That is to say, there is a shift from the semantics of the text to the pragmatics of text interpretation. The essential idea here is that when readers understand a text, they bring to

it their subjective understanding, their personal background, and their contextual knowledge, and they actively and entirely make sense of the text. In opposition to Nida's idea of making the Bible reader-friendly but at the same time never losing sight of the Biblical text and its core meaning, adherents focusing exclusively on the process of *understanding* the original text deny that texts have such independent core meanings. The text is thus not regarded as having a life of its own, but can only be brought to life by the process of interpretation. It starts to live in the act of text interpretation. In 'receiving' an original text, the translator engages in a cyclical learning process—from the text to the interpretation to the text and back again. This cycle finally leads to a so-called 'melting of horizons' between the translating person and the text.

From this point of view, translation involves understanding the original text by 'appropriating' its meaning. In the act of understanding, the text gradually loses its 'foreignness'. The translator builds up an individual mental representation of its meaning, which is then reformulated in the act of rendering it into another text. Reformulation is not different in kind from any other text production—only different in degree. The reconstitution of 'the meaning' of a text to fit another language and context is not central here. Rather it is the type of representation of the text in the translator's mind, arising in the act of understanding the original, which counts in translation. The translator, as the one who understands the source text and then formulates it as the target text, is at the centre of all acts of translation. It is thus not a matter of finding the sense contained in a text and then adjusting it to suit a receptor (as suggested by Nida), but of making sense of a text by interpretation. We are dealing here more with invention than discovery of what is already there in the text.

The focus on the individual translator's process of interpreting a text remains problematic not only because the central notion of what is meant by understanding is never clearly defined, but also because it is altogether too one-sided in its focus on this initial process in the translation cycle. Clearly, translation must involve understanding the original text, but it also, and equally importantly, involves the motivated making of a new text.

Focus on variable interpretations: cultural, ideological, literary

Whereas the focus on an individual's interpretation hinges on the idea that the conditions of the reception of a text by an individual determine how the text is understood and translated, it is also possible to focus on **variable interpretations of a text**. These are conditioned by cultural factors, and they depend on cultural presuppositions.

The fundamental idea here is that there is no reality independent of how human beings perceive it through their culturally tinted glasses. Consequently, it is the way texts are perceived that is real and not the texts themselves. From this point of view, it becomes possible to think of an original text as being dependent on its translation rather than the other way round, and as having existence only through its translated versions. Such a perspective challenges the traditional view of a text having some sort of stable meaning authorized by its producer. While the denial of any such stability of meaning is of course compatible with the focus on the process of individual interpretation, an emphasis on externally conditioned variable interpretations sees the role of the translator not so much as a free individual but as a social being acculturated into a particular community. Translation is essentially a matter of variable interpretation of a text and the author's creative role in text-making is undermined; the translator is licensed to manipulate the original for purposes of experimenting with norms of usage and commenting on the original, rather than translating it in the usual sense of the word. Indeed, from this perspective, translators are encouraged to modify the original, opening up new avenues for 'difference' and postponing indefinitely any possibility that the 'meaning' of the original text be grasped in any conclusive way.

The irrelevance and remaking of the original

The most provocative formulation of this view is that the translator actually creates the original text. This is in line with 'deconstructing' both the notions of authorship and the authority of the original. The original text is thought to be continuously

'rewritten' with each new translation (each new 'reading') reconstructing the original. The question arises, however, as to how far this licence should run: does a translator really have the right to engage in such 'creative rewriting', especially in cases where both author and text have an established standing in the source culture? Has not a translator an ethical responsibility to both? And if the original text is irrelevant, why, one may ask, doesn't the translator write his or her own text to start with?

One answer to this last question is that although a translation may seek to hide the presence of the original, it can nevertheless serve to ensure its survival to make it 'live on' and 'live beyond the means of the original author', just as a mother lives on through her child. It is this function of enabling texts to acquire a sort of 'afterlife', it is argued, which gives a translation its true value. In other words, the translator gives life to the original by giving it a cultural relevance it would not otherwise have.

But the privileged position of the author as meaning-maker can not only be questioned but also challenged as an imposition of authority. This authority, it can be argued, needs to be unmasked as causing unequal power relations. English, for example, with its global reach, can be seen as an 'imperialist' language and translations from English into other ('colonized' and 'dominated') languages can be viewed as increasing the 'hegemony' of the English language. We have here a shift in emphasis from the cultural to the political, and we are moving from interpretations by individuals or sociocultural instigations to open intervention, that is, translation motivated by an external cause or by a critical approach to existing societal states.

Apart from resisting the influence of global 'hegemonic' English by pushing towards increased translations into (not from) English to increase awareness of other cultures and languages, translators are asked to make deliberate changes in viewpoints and expressions in texts whenever they are confronted with an imperialist or 'Orientalist' view. An example would be to resist glorifying Columbus in a text about South America or depicting Arabs as exotic, cruel, sensual, and potentially threatening—in short, as terrorist beings.

Furthermore, in this view, translators are urged to make visible the hidden processes of selecting certain texts for translation

while leaving out others; they are encouraged to use their own translations to 'strike back' against hegemonic powers. They are also incited to 'devour' the original, making it innocuous by 'cannibalizing' it. Cannibalistic views of translation thus also relativize the concept of the 'original', dismantling it as a sign of unequal power. In so doing, they also throw the entire notion of translation into question.

In adopting a 'resistant translation strategy', translators are urged to reveal the foreign original in the translated text rather than attempt to conceal it. For example, in a text on the benefits of the invasion of a country by a foreign power, where the source and its ideological stance are deliberately left out, the translator should make the source official.

When a translation reads fluently, it appears not to have been translated at all. But fluency in a translation text also annihilates differences between source and target communities, and it renders the translator invisible. If, however, translators want to successfully fight their own 'invisibility', they must make their translations 'visible' as sites of linguistic and cultural difference and deliberate re-constitutions of new texts that deviate from their originals.

The right of a translator to assert different cultural values informs a view of translation that emphasizes the role of gender and the necessity for 'gender awareness' in translation; the role of women translators has been influential in this and in the way women are represented in translations. Feminist translation scholars demand an openly feminist stance and a deliberate transformation of original texts in the interests of feminist ideology and their celebration of difference.

Taken together, the message for translators in these 'post-modern' views is also sometimes that they should emancipate themselves from their traditional position of being 'servants' to the original text and its author. They are given the freedom to go beyond what is conventionally seen as translating and create new and different texts, often motivated by socio-political agendas.

The idea that the translated text has its own independent significance is also sometimes seen as particularly relevant to the translation of literature. Here, too, the original text is then

thought to matter very little. It is the way translations relate to the target language literature which is of overriding importance. The crucial consideration here is how translated texts fit into and affect the target literary system. What is relevant is not only how texts are translated but why they were selected for translation in the first place, how they are received, and how they compare with existing texts in the target literature. The focus shifts from the original text and the intentions that led to its production to the conditions of reception, and to the significance that a translated version might have in a different culture.

In this view of translation, the translator is thought to be strongly influenced by the conventions or 'norms' of text production and reception in the target culture. The concept of a **norm** is in fact the key concept for coming to grips with the socially and culturally conditioned network of relations between different translation texts in the target culture and also between translators, their critics, and readers. One can arrive at such translation norms by a comparative examination of several translations of one and the same original text undertaken in different periods by different translators. This comparison can reveal the different norms of translation at different times, bringing out the often unconscious rules that influence a translator's decision processes.

Translation norms are seen as part of the entire complex system of the target culture, for which the term **polysystem** has been coined. A polysystem refers to the entire network of literary and extra-literary systems within a society. All kinds of writing within a given culture, from its central canonical texts to the most marginal, to 'imported' translated texts can be situated therein. System-internal comparisons may reveal whether and how translated texts adopt certain conventions as a result of their relation to other texts in the target language system. The term 'poly' indicates this complexity and interconnectedness of texts, norms, and relations.

Also of particular interest is the innovative influence translations as 'cultural imports' can have on the literary traditions and current conventions of the target cultural system. Translations have been used through the ages as tools for developing national languages and literatures, when, for example, classical traditions helped to establish national canons, or when colonial literatures

rose to fame under the influence of translated literatures. Well known examples are the influence which the translations of Shakespeare's works have had on German literature, and the enormous impact Luther's translation of the Bible has had on the development of the German language.

Such a view of translation necessarily directs attention to the historical development of target culture literary norms and the changeable nature of translation over time and across cultures, when texts were continually renewed in conformity with different cultural norms. For example, translations of Shakespeare into French in accordance with the conventions of the classical theatre are quite different as literary works from later German translations, which are characterized by an all-pervading romanticism reflecting the German *Zeitgeist* at the time. More recent examples are the countless 'realistic' translations of Shakespeare's plays, through which we encounter Shakespeare transformed into an almost native modern playwright.

Translated texts are understood as situated in their target sociocultural context, so that the study of literature is integrated with the study of the social and economic forces of history. Such an integration allows comparisons of different translations of one and the same source text across time and space. An example is the way German children's books were translated into Hebrew before and after the Second World War, when all traces of the origins of the texts such as German names, locations, and so on were eradicated.

A serious drawback to this approach is that the derived version of a text may depart so radically from the original in the interests of cultural adaptability that it becomes impossible to determine whether it is actually a translation or a text that owes its existence to some other textual operation, such as paraphrasing, summarizing, 'actualizing', or 'popularizing' an original text. While one might argue that all translation implies a certain degree of adaptation of the original, there must be some limits as to how far this can go while still claiming that the derived text is a translation. Can translation really be considered a completely relative term, dependent on the forces of history and the poly-systems of culture? We will take up this important issue again in Chapters 3 and 4.

Focus on the purpose of a translation

Just as upgrading the translated text in line with a focus on target culture norms denies the integrity of the original text, so too does a focus on the purpose (or **skopos**) of the translated text. Here the focus is on making the translation 'relevant' to the recipients. Target culture norms are crucial, because it is in the target cultural environment that the translation will have to achieve its purpose. Consequently, the role of the original, and its linguistic make-up is diminished. At the same time, the position of the translator, who is in fact often referred to as a 'co-author', is given more status and esteem, as he or she is seen as holding the key to fulfilling the all-important purpose of functional relevance.

Since the original is here reduced to the status of an 'offer of information', its linguistic forms and meanings lose importance as well. Again, the critical issue is whether a text is assumed to have some kind of 'core meaning' independent of the meaning which the recipients of a text earmarked for a certain purpose ascribe to it. In the case of business correspondence, mail order catalogues, sales reports, tourist brochures, instructions for use, technical texts, advertisements, etc., one might well argue that they have very little core meaning worth maintaining. Such texts can easily be 'recast' for new audiences, particularly since they tend to focus on the recipients' immediate actions. It is decidedly not what the author talks about in the original text, but the effect the translated text has on its recipients that matters. And this effect can often only be captured at the expense of the original's semantic meaning.

But, we may ask, does this focus on effect justify a disregard for the original text in all text types? For many literary and scientific texts of historical significance, it may be essential to render meaning faithfully, and they deserve a degree of autonomy from recipients. In other words, the specific properties of such texts may need to exert some control over how they are to be interpreted.

Summary

Given its complexity, translation can, and indeed must be approached from different perspectives—linguistic, cultural,

socio-political, literary, purpose-oriented. Linguistic perspectives on translation, which focus on the original text, have recently widened their scope considerably—from a concern with lexical and semantic meaning to embracing functional and pragmatic views of language. Scholars who sympathize with the other more psychosocial, more 'subjective' perspectives on translation sometimes deny the very relevance of the original text, emphasizing the importance of the relevance and effect of the target text. A focus on variable, culturally conditioned interpretations of texts, and on the purpose of a translation are the most recent, late twentieth century contributions to the field.

3

Equivalence in translation

Translation is a process of replacing a text in one language (the source language) with a text in a different language (the target language). The first text is original and independent, but the second only exists as a version derived from the first. The derived version stands in for the original, and the two texts are said to be equivalent. The notion of **equivalence**, however, is by no means a simple one.

Different types of equivalence

When we say two things are equivalent we do not mean that they are identical but that they have certain things in common, and function in similar ways. So one might say that a light bulb is the modern equivalent of a candle even though in most respects there is no resemblance between them at all. In the same way, a translated text will obviously bear very little linguistic resemblance to the original, but can be equivalent, that is to say, equal in value, in that it conveys a similar message and fulfils a similar function. But what counts as similarity will vary according to where one sets one's priorities and where one's focus of interest lies, as we have seen in Chapter 2.

Equivalence in translation cannot be taken to mean 'identity' or reversibility because there can never be a one-to-one relationship between a source text and one particular translation text. Rather, a particular source text will have many different translation texts that can be called 'equivalent' to the source text in different ways, depending on how similarity of message or function is interpreted; this will have to take into account varying pragmatic factors, the

differences between the two language systems involved, and so on. Translators must always decide between several alternative ways of realizing a particular meaning in a particular context of use, and often end up opting for some sort of compromise.

The first kind of equivalence we might consider is of a linguistic kind, and here we can refer to Catford's distinction, mentioned in Chapter 2, between formal correspondence and textual equivalence. Formal correspondence exists between items in the original and the translated texts whenever a category in the target language system occupies the same position as does the corresponding category in the source language. For instance, the category of modal verbs exists in the systems of both English and German. The English modal verb 'can' is therefore replaceable by the formally corresponding German modal verb *können*. Sometimes this formal correspondence will have textual equivalence. Thus, for example, 'I can never slice onions without crying' can be translated into *Ich kann nie ohne zu weinen Zwiebeln schneiden*. But such formal correspondence is often not available, and then the translator has to engage in so-called translation shifts in word classes or structures. There is no direct correspondence in English, for example, of the German modal particle *wohl*, and in this case, the English modal verb 'may' can be used as a possible textual equivalent. The example *Er hat deinen Geburtstag wohl vergessen*, can be rendered in English as 'He may have forgotten your birthday'.

Another distinction which was briefly mentioned in Chapter 2 is Eugene Nida's formal equivalence versus dynamic equivalence. There are occasions when it is appropriate for textual equivalence to stay very close to formal correspondence, even when the result seems stilted and 'unnatural'. This is the case in translations of legal or sacred documents where exact wording is considered crucial to the message being conveyed. This kind of formal equivalence seeks to preserve as many features of the original as possible. By contrast, dynamic equivalence seeks to accommodate the needs and norms of target culture readers, and to produce a text that will more naturally engage the reader. Dynamic equivalence is likely to be more appropriate, for example, in translations of advertisements, letters to shareholders, or tourist brochures.

Given the differences between the way languages encode reality, and the varying contextual factors that affect the interpretation of texts, we can conclude that equivalence can only be relative. But this relativity has to be controlled by the recognition of what is known as 'invariance'. This refers to features in the source text which it is essential for the target text to convey, however different it might be in other respects. Invariant features are said to capture the **tertium comparationis** in translation, that is, the third element or factor that is the common ground between two elements being compared. Invariance, therefore, ultimately determines how far a translation is considered to be equivalent, and it must be decided anew for each and every individual case. As we saw in the previous chapter, what is considered invariant largely depends on what is deemed to be the essential content, point, or purpose of the original text or of the translation; and it varies greatly depending on the different approaches to translation we looked at earlier. Whether and to what degree equivalence can be achieved depends, then, on the interplay of many different factors. In an attempt to systematize all these factors, a small number of different equivalence frameworks have been proposed by Werner Koller, who identifies the five most important ones as follows:

- 1 The extralinguistic, 'real-world' referents to which the text relates. This type of equivalence is called **denotative equivalence**. For example, in the sentences 'The capital of Italy is Rome' and *Die Hauptstadt von Italien ist Rom*, the words 'Rome' and *Rom* have the same denotation, and are thus denotatively equivalent.
- 2 The connotations conveyed in the text, that is, the culturally normative feelings or associations evoked by a specific term or phrase, and by different levels of usage or styles, or social and geographical dialects. The equivalence relation constituted here is called **connotative equivalence**. For example, the connotations evoked by the term 'breakfast' in an English-speaking context may differ radically from the associations this term evokes in Islamic countries during Ramadan.
- 3 The linguistic and textual norms of usage that characterize a particular text. The type of equivalence which relates to text

types is called **text-normative equivalence**. For example, a letter layout differs widely across linguistic and cultural communities, and this needs to be taken account of in translation.

- 4 The recipients of the translation for whom the translation is 'specially designed', so that it fulfils its special communicative function for these recipients. This type of equivalence is called **pragmatic equivalence**. For example, in a modern Italian translation of the Bible we might find a reference to Jesus riding into Rome on a Vespa instead of entering Jerusalem on a donkey. (This is, in fact, an example given by Eugene Nida in one of his talks about Bible translation.)
- 5 The aesthetic, formal characteristics of the original text. This type of equivalence is **formal-aesthetic equivalence**. For example, if the translator succeeded in maintaining wordplays, rhymes, assonance, alliteration phenomena in the translation, he or she would have managed to achieve formal-aesthetic equivalence.

Given these different frameworks and resultant types of equivalence in translation, it becomes immediately clear that not all of them can be achieved in any particular case. True to the nature of translation as a decision process, it is always necessary to make a choice. In other words, the translator will have to set up a hierarchy of demands on equivalence, depending on what kind of text is being dealt with, and the purpose and type of translation aimed at.

The controversy over equivalence

Criticism of the use of equivalence as a central concept for translation often presupposes a rather narrow view of equivalence based on formal syntactic and lexical similarities alone. But, as was pointed out earlier, the term equivalence refers to two or more entities being of 'equal value', 'corresponding value', or 'having the same use or function as something else'. Two texts can therefore be equivalent in this sense even when there is little formal correspondence between them.

Because the notion of equivalence is often associated with formal correspondence and with a belief in the importance of the original text, it tends to be shunned as too mechanistic and restrictive by proponents of the interpretation-oriented and the purpose-

oriented approaches to translation discussed in Chapter 2. They regard equivalence as incompatible with their concern with subjective interpretation and the purpose of a translation. They also reject equivalence because it seems to presuppose that there is some stable core meaning in a text which can be transferred intact to another text—an assumption that runs counter to the idea that meaning is made out of a text and is dependent on reader interpretation. Instead of equivalence, the notion of 'intelligibility' is then often preferred because intelligibility has to do not with the text itself but with the manner in which it is understood. Critics of the concept of equivalence have also suggested defining it to mean simply the relation between a target text and a source text whenever these are of 'equal communicative value'. Equivalence defined in this way would then be a special sub-case of what is called 'adequacy', with adequacy meaning that source and target text have the same purpose. To take a simple example, if in a translation of an original English text in which a cup of tea is being offered, the offer is replaced with the offer of a cup of coffee, the translation would still be called adequate because it fulfils the same purpose of showing hospitality.

What are we to make of these criticisms of the concept of equivalence and the various attempts at replacing it with alternative notions? Is it useful for our understanding of translation to link equivalence, the heart of the process of translation, to intelligibility and communicative purpose, or does this linkage result in a total dependence of equivalence on the conditions of reception and the situation of use? If equivalence is used in the relative sense of the broadly differentiated equivalence frameworks described above, it certainly remains a useful, indeed indispensable concept. It is, however, necessary to make the concept more precise, so that we can define the limits of equivalence and so distinguish between a text that is a translation and one that is some sort of adaptation or **version** of the original.

An analytic framework for establishing equivalence

We can make the basic assumption that the original and its translation should have an equivalent function whenever possible.

This function can be defined as simply the application or use which a text has in a particular context of situation. Text and context of situation are indeed separate, but the two interact with each other through an inextricable connection between the social environment and the functional organization of language. When we analyse an original text, compare it with its translation, and establish the equivalence framework guiding the translation, both texts must be referred to the particular situation surrounding them. To do this, the broad notion of context of situation must be broken down into manageable analytic units.

One way of doing this is via the use of the concepts of **field**, **tenor**, and **mode**—three sociolinguistic dimensions of the context of situation jointly characterizing a particular **register**, or segment of language in use. Field captures the subject matter or topic. Here we ask questions such as: What is the text about? What kinds of things are in the text? If the analysis yields the result that the field is identified as the same in the original and the translation, we can say that the two texts are equivalent in propositional content, that is, in what the author is talking about. Tenor refers to the nature of the participants, the author and his or her addressees, the relationship between them in terms of social power and familiarity, the author's intellectual and affective stance, that is, his or her personal viewpoint. Here we ask questions such as: How does the author relate to the reader and maybe to the persons depicted in the text? How do author and readers relate to each other through the text? Equivalence of tenor would mean that the two texts represent the same kind of interpersonal interaction. Mode refers to the channel of communication, the spoken or written medium, with many in-between possibilities such as 'written to be read' or 'written to be spoken as if not written'. Here we ask questions such as: How is the text actually manifested? What medium is used, and how? Equivalence in the dimension of mode relates to the means whereby the communication is enacted. The result of the analysis according to this scheme is a textual profile which in its entirety can be taken to characterize the register of a particular text, that is to say, the way the text relates to particular contextual factors.

But analysing a text in terms of these features of register does not of itself reveal how it functions pragmatically as discourse,

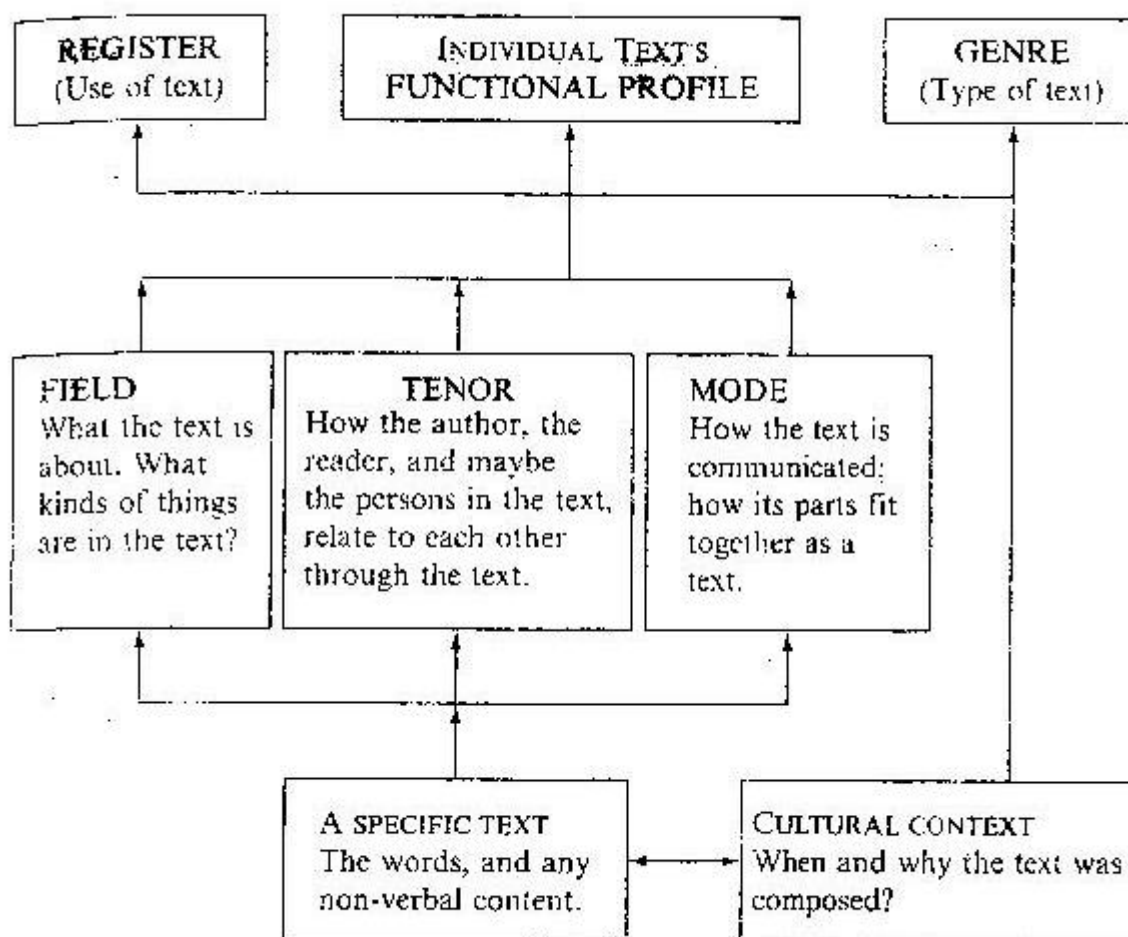


FIGURE 3.1 *A system for analysing original and translated texts and assessing their functional equivalence*

what it is intended to mean, or how it is to be interpreted as a communicative event. We need to extend this scheme by introducing the notion of **genre**. Genres, such as, for example, a market report, a sermon, a scientific paper, a letter to shareholders, are culturally determined communicative events which are textually realized by specific configurations of lexical and grammatical units. Genres link texts to culture, in such a way that an individual textual exemplar is related to the shared knowledge about the nature of other similar texts with which this text shares a communicative purpose. While register captures the connections between a text and its immediate context, genre connects an individual text with the larger cultural context of the linguistic and cultural community in which the text is embedded. In other words, we might say that while register can be seen as relating to a type of text, defined by its linguistic features, genre can be seen as a kind of discourse defined by its communicative function in the linguistic-cultural community at large. Genre can thus be

understood as the realization of a particular configuration of the three register dimensions. The resulting scheme for assessing the **functional equivalence** of an original text and its translation linking the categories of register and genre are shown graphically in Figure 3.1.

In using this scheme for determining whether and how original and translation texts are equivalent, it becomes clear, however, that the nature of the equivalence that can be reached crucially depends on the type of translation we are dealing with. This leads us to the distinction between overt and covert translation.

Overt and covert translation

Translation involves the movement of texts across time and space, and whenever texts move, they also shift from one discourse world into another and so relate to a different sociocultural reality. Applying the concept of discourse world to different types of translation, we can say that in an **overt translation**, the original sociocultural frame is left as intact as possible, given the need of expression in another language. An overt translation is thus quite overtly a translation, not as it were a second original. Relating 'overt translation' to the three-tiered analytical scheme presented above, an original and its overt translation can be equivalent at the level of text, register, and genre, but not at the level of the individual text's functional profile, i.e. what the text can mean for a target reader. Functional equivalence between the two texts is in principle possible, but this equivalence is different in nature: it can be described as merely giving the new readers access to the function of the original. But as this access is to be realized in a different language and takes place in the target linguistic and cultural community, a switch in the discourse world becomes necessary, such that the translation operates in its own discourse world, and can thus reach at best something that might be called **second-level functional equivalence**. Examples of such a 'removed' type of equivalence are texts that originate in a specific non-repeatable historic situation such as speeches given by famous personalities at a certain time and in a certain place. Readers of the translation will know that the text was not meant for them, but for other addressees. Take, for example, a sermon given by Karl Barth to

prisoners in a Basel prison in the spring of the year 1964. This text is a religious sermon intended for the inmates of a particular prison at a particular time with the intention of comforting these addressees in their particular situation. We find references to particular events and trends that characterize the period of time in which the text was written and the sermon delivered—all designed to mean something for the original addressees. The translation of this text can only be overt, it will never 'mean' the same for other addressees. The equivalence can only be partial and second-hand.

As this type of equivalence is, however, achieved through equivalence at the levels of text, register, and genre, the discourse world of the original is co-activated, so members of the target culture can 'eavesdrop', and appreciate the original textual function, albeit at a remove. In overt translation, the work of the translator is visible. Since it is the translator's task to give target culture members an unadulterated impression of, and access to, the original text and its cultural impact on source culture members, the translator puts target culture members in a position to observe and/or judge this text 'from the outside'.

By contrast, in **covert translation**, the translator can and should attempt to recreate an equivalent sociocultural event. The translation is to act as though it were not a translation. The task of the translator is then, in a sense, to hide the text's real origin. The translator him/herself remains invisible, hiding behind his or her 're-creation' of the original. In a covert translation, the function the original has in its discourse world is to be reproduced as far as possible. A covert translation operates therefore quite 'overtly' in the discourse world of the target culture, with no attempt being made to co-activate the discourse world in which the original unfolds. Since full functional equivalence is aimed at, the original may be manipulated at the levels of text and register via the use of a cultural filter—see below. The result may be a very real distance from the original. While the original and its covert translation need not be equivalent at the levels of text and register, they should be equivalent at the levels of genre and the individual text's functional profile. Examples of covert translations are translations of advertisements which are to act as though they were originals in order to be as effective and persuasive as their originals.

In determining the nature of the equivalence between an original and its translation, it is essential that the fundamental differences between the two kinds of translation, overt and covert, be taken into account. These two types of translation make very different demands on the translator. An overt translation is in a sense the 'more straightforward' because the original can be 'taken over' without sociocultural modification. In covert translation, however, the translator has to consider the different discourse worlds of the source and target cultures and apply what is known as a cultural filter.

The concept and function of a cultural filter

A **cultural filter** is a means of capturing differences in culturally shared conventions of behaviour and communication, preferred rhetorical styles, and expectation norms in the source and target speech communities. Given the goal of achieving functional equivalence in covert translation, assumptions of cultural difference should be carefully examined before intervention in the meaning of the original is undertaken by the translator. These cultural differences are to be identified at all levels of analysis. The unmarked assumption is one of cultural compatibility, unless there is evidence to the contrary. Such evidence can be provided by cross-cultural research, which then gives substance to language-pair specific cultural filters. To take an example, in the case of the German and Anglophone linguistic and cultural communities, the cultural filter can be given some substance through empirical contrastive-pragmatic analyses; these may reveal different preferences along a set of dimensions such as directness versus indirectness, explicitness versus implicitness, and so on. Take, for example, the translation of a request in an English original text 'Would you get out of there please' (said by a teacher to a student in a swimming-pool) into German as *Raus hier jetzt!* Here one would need to take into account the generally more direct conventions of requesting in comparable institutional contexts and genres in order to assess the appropriateness of the cultural filtering.

While contrastive pragmatics and contrastive discourse analyses can make useful contributions to evaluating covert

translations, it remains a challenge to assess the adequateness of applications of a cultural filter. Given the dynamic nature of communicative norms and the way research necessarily lags behind, translation critics will have to struggle to remain abreast of new developments if they want to be able to judge fairly the appropriateness of changes through the application of such cultural filters.

The limits of equivalence?

We have said that the concept of equivalence is more favourably considered by proponents of a linguistic perspective on translation. But even here, its validity can be and indeed has been questioned on the grounds that it runs counter to the facts of linguistic relativity, i.e. the idea, commonly known as the **Whorfian hypothesis**, that our mother tongue shapes and constrains our thoughts and behaviours. Applied to translation, this implies not only that the appropriate meanings in the target language can neither be accessed nor reproduced by the translator because words across languages never exactly correspond as lexical items because they encode different semantic features and enter into different sense relations with other words. It also means that since a grammatical form must necessarily change in translation, the meaning which is uniquely encoded in that form must necessarily be lost in translation too. On this account, there can never be any formal correspondence across languages and so the translation of one text into another is impossible: the only equivalence one can hope to achieve is bound to be of a general functional kind.

But how valid is this **linguistic relativity hypothesis**? In its strong version, this hypothesis amounts to linguistic determinism, i.e. the grammar and lexicon of the language we were socialized in determines our thoughts and behaviour. What proof is there that our language actually has this imprisoning grip on us, making us see the world around us through its tinted glasses and preventing us from fully grasping what other languages mean, let alone translating them? While there have been surprisingly few studies testing the strong Whorfian hypothesis in the last fifty years or so, interest in it has recently re-emerged, and several

empirical studies have examined how language, thought, and reality are interconnected in clearly delimited areas (space, time, colours). Although many of these studies do point to differences in the way speakers of different languages engage in 'thinking for speaking'—i.e. conceiving of spatial and temporal domains and of the interaction between speaker and hearer—we cannot draw the conclusion from this evidence that these differences amount to insuperable differences in worldview and inherent difficulties for translation. In other words, although linguistic categories may *dispose* people to conceive of the world in a certain way, they do not *determine* their conceptions. Language is much more flexible and has within itself the creative force to transcend its own category distinctions. The potential of the systems of all the languages in the world is not really that different: the differences between languages are not so much in kind as in the degree of explicitness and emphasis. What one language has built into the layers of its structure, another language expresses only very informally and sporadically, but all languages have the resources to express any experience in an equivalent manner. This **universal expressibility principle** also implies a **universal translatability principle**.

Our thinking is to a certain degree influenced by the linguistic organization of experience because concepts encoded in a single term are simply more readily available than concepts for which no single term is available. However, the creativity of the individual language user ensures that language can never have an overpowering influence on his or her thoughts. We are perfectly capable of forming and mentally manipulating concepts for which there is no word in our language. In characterizing human language, we might therefore supplement the principle of universal expressibility with the principle of conceivability. And it is these aspects of human language that translation illustrates and exploits.

To sum up, there is no direct correlation between language, thought, and reality. Speakers are not imprisoned by the language they speak. There is always an escape through the creative potential of language itself, and through the creativity of its users. Language, thought, and reality are in continual dynamic interaction with each other. This is what makes communication

possible, and it is the business of translation to establish how this interaction is achieved in particular instances of text.

However, despite the validity of the principle of translatability, we should nevertheless remember that there *do* exist certain specifiable limits to translatability. First of all, the possibility of translation is limited if we take what one may call 'private connotations' seriously, i.e. all those emotive-affective associations which individuals tend to have with certain expressions. Questions as to which particular connotations the author of a text had in mind and whether the translator had similar ones, cannot really be answered because such private connotations defy explicit definition, and vary even within one person's mind according to his or her mood and experience. The enormous difficulty in literary translation derives mainly from the fact that literary texts abound in such basically elusive connotations.

A second limit to translatability occurs when language departs from its 'normal' communicative function. This is the case when linguistic form is itself an essential element of the message, as in literature, and particularly poetry, for example. Here meaning and form always operate closely together; they are no longer arbitrarily connected, and cannot be changed without a corresponding change of meaning. Thus, paraphrases, commentaries, explanations, coining or borrowing of new words and phrases—all of which render the translation of other genres in principle possible—are not really sufficient in literary translation. Another case of 'abnormal' functioning of language would be wordplays of various kinds, which are so closely tied to a particular language system that they cannot be translated. The English pun 'Is life worth living? It depends on the liver!' is not translatable because the double meaning of 'liver' cannot, in principle, be reproduced in any other language.

Another area of untranslatability relates to what we might call 'metalanguage'. If language is part of reality, and if all aspects of reality can be expressed in any language, it is also possible to talk *about* language. This is 'metalanguage', in which language is not only the medium of communication, but also the object of communication. And metalanguage, it is often claimed, is untranslatable. For example, in the sentence 'You have written "skill" with a "c" again, instead of a "k"': 'skill', 'c', and 'k' cannot be

translated because the physical orthography of the word 'skill' cannot be duplicated in any language other than English.

Summary.

A translated text can never be identical to its original; it can only be equivalent to it in certain respects. These can be systematized in the form of five equivalence frameworks, not all of which can be fulfilled simultaneously. The choice a translator is forced to make between differently equivalent expressions depends in each individual case on the hierarchy of equivalence demands he/she sets up for himself/herself, or is asked to follow. Translation is only possible with reference to the concept of equivalence, for there can be no exact transference of meaning across texts in different languages, only an approximation appropriate to purpose. But how far that purpose can be achieved is also dependent on the limits of translatability. Only when the central concept of equivalence is clarified, is it possible to evaluate the quality of a translation. It is to translation evaluation that we will now turn.

4

Views on evaluating translations

How do we know when a translation is good? Evaluating translations has always been both an academic and a popular undertaking: philologists and philosophers, journalists, poets, and all manner of lay people have expressed opinions on what makes a good translation.

Impressionistic and subjective views

Impressionistic reflections on the quality of a translation are often expressed in terms of 'the faithfulness to the original', 'the retention of the original's flavour, spirit, or its local colour'. They may concentrate on 'the natural flow of a translation' or the 'pleasure and delight of the reader'. These subjective judgements are based on two very different kinds of criteria: how far a translation captures what the original writer intended to convey on the one hand, or, on the other hand, how far a translation makes effective sense for its readers. The quality of a translation is then believed to depend on the extent to which the translator is temperamentally in tune with what the writer intended by a text, and how a reader might interpret it. The tendency of this subjective approach is to evaluate individual examples of translation more or less at random to come up with *ad hoc* 'optimal solutions'. Deriving more objective criteria for the quality of a translation is considered futile because the value of a translation is said to depend primarily on the translator's individual talents.

Not surprisingly, such an impressionistic approach to evaluation results in a rather confused, not to say contradictory, set of conditions to be met for a good translation to be achieved.